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tertaining friends, or sleeping when they were not visiting their wives. A cowshed a few yards from the residential buildings completed the arrangements in a normal retainer homestead. In village headmen's and chiefly households whose women often had Brahman husbands a separate building with its own kitchen was set aside to entertain the men when they visited their wives.

The buildings and outer courtyard were surrounded by a shady garden of coconut, jack, cashew, and mango trees. Chiefs and village headmen had a private bathing pool with stone steps round it in their own gardens. Retainers more often bathed in the large public bathing pools attached to the temples and reserved for "clean" castes of the village. Men and women bathed and swam daily on opposite sides of the pool.

In the southwest corner of the garden an open space was set aside as the property group's cremation ground, entered only at funerals. In another corner was a dense shrubbery devoted to the snake gods of the group. Offerings were made there to small stone images of cobras, and if real cobras appeared they were regarded as manifestations of these deities.

A high bamboo fence surrounded the whole establishment. It was entered through a wooden gatehouse within which armed men might sit on guard in time of war.

Economic Activities The property group obtained almost all of its subsistence from garden and paddy lands held on tenure from the village landlord and cultivated by Tiyyar sub-tenants or by Pulaya serfs. The property group surrendered part of its produce in kind as dues to the landlord. It retained part for maintenance, stored part for repayment to its serfs as daily subsistence, and gave portions twice annually to the village servant households. Tiyyar tenants retained enough for their own needs, but gave the bulk of their produce to their Nayar masters. Increasingly during the period of European trade the property group also sold spices and coconuts to Muslim middlemen in exchange for cash or cloth. The cash was used to buy brass and silver vessels, gold ornaments and jewelry, and other luxury goods from the towns. The property group gave some cloth to its serfs and tenants at festivals once a year.

The kāranavan managed all these transactions and controlled the group's estate. He might allocate specific tasks of management to juniors, but no payment was made on behalf of the group, no crops were sold, and no goods were consumed without his consent. Junior men serving in the king's wars received small daily cash sums on an

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Nambudiri Brahmans

eldest son also traditionally observed *dīkṣā* for his father along with the matrilineal heir.

Age-rank within the *taravād* finds expression in the rites. Among Nambūdiri Brahmans, if an unmarried but initiated boy dies, his father may perform his funeral and anniversary rites. For the souls of father and son are dependent upon one another for salvation. But among Nāyars, a man may not take part in funeral rites for one junior to him in the *taravād*, for respect toward juniors is inappropriate. A Nāyar who dies leaving no junior old enough to act as chief mourner is therefore buried without ceremony and no rites are performed for his ghost.

Nāyars have adopted the Brahmanical belief that funeral and anniversary rites assist the spirit in its passage to another world, and that immersion of the ashes in sacred water affords it peace. Like the Brahmans, they acknowledge the theory of rebirth, and hold that a spirit which is correctly propitiated after death is likely to be eventually reborn in a high estate. As in the case of the Brahmans, the theory of *karma* provides the Nāyars with a moral rationale for their high position in the caste system, and it is chiefly in this connection that I have heard it quoted. It is difficult to discover how old are Sanskritic beliefs concerning the soul among Nāyars, and they are not uniform at the present day. Most Nāyars use the word *pretam* to refer to the ghost or the soul in all contexts. This is a Sanskrit word (*preta*) for a malevolent ghost, but it is used by Nambūdiri Brahmans only for alien malevolent ghosts. A few Nāyars stated that that aspect of the soul which is reborn is the *ātmā*. This Sanskrit word is used by Brahmans for the soul in connection with rebirth and with union with the universal soul, called *paramātmā*. The *ātmā*, these Nāyar informants say, is neither malevolent nor beneficent. It cannot be understood by ordinary people and is a subject for philosophers. The *pretam*, by contrast, is the punitive ghost of an ancestor or of one who died violently. It can be only too easily understood even by the ignorant and does not require deep study. This belief in two souls, or in a soul and a ghost, may be modern, for it was given by only a few younger informants.

At all events, the Sanskritic rites of death are customarily adapted by Nāyars to belief in a malevolent *pretam*, for at every step fear of the *pretam* is referred to. Whereas Brahmans perform the rites ostensibly in order that the soul may be at peace, Nāyars have traditionally performed them in active fear of the ghost's retaliation should its comfort not be ensured. During the days of pollution, Nāyars offer rice balls before a palmyra stem set up in the yard before the ancestral house. The *pretam* of the deceased is believed to enter this stem, and it is believed that it will attack the *taravād* with further death or with sickness if the offerings are not satisfactorily performed. During the offerings each Nāyar propitiant in turn wears round his waist a piece of cloth torn from the wrapper of the corpse in order to associate himself with the spirit. But inside this cloth Nāyars also tuck a knife, blade uppermost, to ward off the spirit's attack. After the offerings are made, both Brahmans and Nāyars clap their wet hands to summon crows to eat the rice balls. If the crows do not come, it is believed that the spirit has not received the offering. This may then be repeated on the advice of the astrologer. In Tanjore, Brahmans seemed to regret the miscarriage of the offering only for the sake of the spirit. But Nāyars regard it as an extremely evil omen, and fear the ghost's retaliation in the form of a second death within the *taravād*. The Brahmanical ceremonies themselves contain rites of segregation from the deceased which are susceptible to the interpretation that those who perform them wish to be rid of him. Such, for example, is the rite of dashing a pot of water at the head end of

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SNAKE WORSHIP AMONG THE NAYARS OF SOUTH INDIA

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NO species of animal has impressed mankind to the same extent as the snake apparently has. Startling indeed is its power of sudden appearance and disappearance; and its gliding motion, without appendages, gives it an eerie quality. The lightning suddenness of its bite and the tragic consequences, coupled with its amazing swiftness, place the snake in a category of its own. Above all its habit of casting off its skin periodically endows it with a supposed immortality which becomes the cause of its extreme veneration. Snake worship is very widespread in the world and is attended by varying rites and ceremonies. In India, where many species of snakes abound, the cult is very widespread. Perhaps due to the variety of species and the consequent danger and damage involved, snake worship in India may have had a local origin, though J. Tod traces its origin to a Central Asian tribe called Tak.[1]

It is significant that in the very rude and low cultures, among tribes like the Veddahs and Andamanese, and to some extent among the Australians, snake worship is not found. The Australians do have totemic clans named after snakes, but no special veneration is paid to snakes as such. In West Africa, on the other hand, among the Dahomey tribe the monster python Dahu Sio is worshipped as a great god, and is propitiated for favourable weather, for oracles and for wealth. Even in the Palaeolithic period snakes were held in esteem, judging from the carved snake figures on the batons de commandment, and also during Mesolithic period as evinced by snake paintings on the painted pebbles of Mas-d-Azil.

E. W. Hopkins observes that in the Vedic Age snake worship was widely prevalent in India, and references are made

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to Abibuduya, the serpent of the deep. Further, an inscription at Banavasi in Kanara in South India, records the erection of a cobra stone in the middle of the 1st century A.D.

In Chamba district the 'golden snake' is offered milk.[6] In Bengal the snake goddess Manasa is worshipped widely, and this is supposed to give protection from snake-bite. Manasa is represented by an earthen pot with vermilion marks. Among the Meithies of Manipur the snake is believed to be the manifestation of a dead ancestor and is accordingly venerated and worshipped. A cult of the snake god is found among the Khasis of Assam, which however is diminishing now-a-days. Among the Khasis a mythical snake called U Thlen is worshipped and is propitiated by the offering of human blood.[7] It is believed that the Thlen attaches itself to homes and families and is the bestower of wealth, prosperity, fame and well-being to its hosts. However, it needs regular and periodic propitiation by the offering of human blood, and in the event of its being neglected it brings disease, ill luck and ruin to the unlucky family which has angered it.

In South India and particularly among the Nayars the worship of snakes is an established cult. Snake groves or *kavus*, which are clumps of wild trees festooned with creepers, abound in plenty, usually near the homes of Malayali Hindus. These groves are called *vishathum kavu* (poison shrine) or *nagakotta* (snake shrine). Usually a block of granite is carved into the shape of a cobra's head, called *chitra kutta kalu* and is consecrated at the spot.

In Quilon district, Travancore, near Haripad is a big snake worship centre in the form of the Manarsalil temple. One of the important snake shrines is called *bernie kavu* situated in Chenganur taluk of the Quilon district. In Trivandrum is the great temple of Padmanabha Swami and here one of the important deities worshipped is Ananta, the mighty serpent, upon whose great coils Lord Vishnu reclines on the ocean of milk.[8] Further, in Tirunelveli a temple dedicted to Shankar and the goodess Gomiti called Sankaranianar Koil has a snake mound where worship is offered to serpents in the hope that chronic stomach ailments will be cured by propitiating the

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deity. Besides these, there are innumerable private snake shrines, particularly in pious households.

All diseases or misfortunes are due to the neglect of snakes. Leprosy, itches, sterility of women and deaths due to poison, are attributed to the anger of snake gods. The remedy for snake-bite lies in the propitiation of serpents through worship at the snake shrine. If no such shrine exists, then a diligent search is made and a 'snake stone' is dug up from the vicinity. Thereafter this accidental find of the snake stone is duly consecrated and worshipped, and all the erstwhile troubles are attributed to the inadvertent neglect of the sacred stone. The person dying of snake-bite is taboo, because his body is supposed to be occupied thereafter by the snake god, and it needs to be disposed of in a special manner with particular reverence and specific rituals.

Among the Nayars of South India snake worship assumes unique importance. It is popularly believed that in early times a Pambakattu Nambutiri brahmin brought the serpents with him and left them in their present abode. He however promised to return one day but never did. Strangely enough, in Travancore, a Pambakattu Nambutiri family still resides and is not permitted to enter the Manarsalil temple for fear that the snakes might leave the area and follow the brahmin to his abode. In a special ceremony called *kavu muttam* or the shifting of the snake shrines from one place to another in the compound of the house—if accidentally the shrine is awkwardly situated in a plot of land where construction is to begin—the Pambakattu Nambutiri is called specially to do the necessary shifting ceremony. He purifies the new area and transfers the shrine to the newly consecrated spot, to the accompaniment of sacred incantations. Thereafter there is feasting and the brahmin is paid money and is presented with a set of new clothes. This is in striking coincidence with the legend of origin, and lends credence to the story of the origin of snake worship, particularly in Manarsalil temple in Quilon, as being connected with Pambakattu Nambutiri brahmins.

The plans of snake shrines have much in common, though some are small and some big. The Manarsalil temple

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is surrounded by a series of concentric circles as it were, on the outside is a wide road where fairs are held and much commerce goes on on festive days. The low castes cannot go beyond this outer fringe. Lodged within, is the garden where the snakes are to be seen in their natural habitat. In this area is a sacred tank, the water of which is rather dirty due to falling vegetation, but which is reputed to be medicinal in property. Here too is a very large vessel into which milk is poured by the priest so that the snakes might be well fed. Within this belt of vegetation and bushes is the shrine itself. There is a verandah with a central hall called *mandapa* with an open space in front, and in the centre is the platform where the snake deities are enshrined. There are two images here, one of Nag Raj with five heads and the other of a serpent with only one head. This is the inner sanctuary where only the priest enters. In Manarsalil temple a virgin priestess conducts the most sacred rites and is considered to be the guardian of the serpents.

A similar position pertains among the Meitheis of Manipur, where a priestess looks after the serpent god called Pak-hangba.[8] Near the verandah is a sacred well from which water is drawn as offering to the deities and is afterwards distributed to the devotees as holy water. It is believed that only pious people can see the snakes in the forest and the wicked cannot. The devotee considers himself blessed if he is able to catch a glimpse of the snake while on his way to the temple.

The common private snake shrine in Travancore lies within the compound of the house, often near the boundary, and away from the main building, in order to best preserve its sanctity and to avoid accidental pollution by inadvertent trespass by some members of the family. The abode of the snake god is called *sarpa kavu*, and this is usually a raised patch of land surrounded by bushes and trees. In the foliage there must be a plant yielding milky sap and in the absence of such a plant, one is planted near the shrine. The trees near the shrine are never cut and the area in the vicinity of the *sarpa kavu* is kept very clean. Often granite images of many-headed snakes with spreading

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hoods are placed in the shrine, and no insect or rat or other animal is killed in the consecrated spot. Even broken bits of snake images are worshipped and they are set up in a row. No image or snake-stone is permitted to fall down, as that is considered to be inauspicious. On the inner surface of the hood of the snake is carved a seated female figure.

These sacred snakes are supposed to be different from the ordinary serpents. They are given the status of benign family deities and are presumed to possess strange powers and the attribute of gods. They are revered and they deign to live only under ceremonially pure conditions and surroundings, accepting only vegetarian offerings and abhorring animal sacrifice. In contrast mention may be made of the Thlen of the Khasis which demands human blood as offering. In the event however of their abode being polluted, e. g., by a menstruating woman, the serpents are angered, and unless propitiated may cause disease or harm to the offender. The sacred serpent called *sarpam* is supposed to be small, about 6 to 18 inches in length and is golden in colour. It is highly poisonous but ordinarily does not do any harm. If properly propitiated it guards the family and brings good luck and prosperity; but if neglected, insulted, or otherwise uncared for, it causes skin disease, leprosy or loss of sight. Such a punishment is visited on the offender or on his near relatives. As a consequence certain taboos are attached to the shrines and no menstruating or pregnant woman may come within six yards of the shrine, nor should anyone enter it without taking a bath.

The actual worship or *puja* is conducted either once or twice a year. The priest cooks rice in milk and adds pieces of ripe plantain to it, with a few flowering heads of the sacred *tulsi* plant dropped in towards the end. The offering is cooked on a special oven near the *sarpa kavu* in a bell-metal vessel. Thereafter, the priest pours some water over the snake idols to ceremonially bathe them and places a bunch of areca-nut palm in efflorescence on the head of the image in a diagonal fashion. The idol is then anointed with turmeric powder and basil leaves and flower petals are

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showered on it, and it is often garlanded. Incantations and *mantras* are recited by the priest during the ceremony.

Bell-metal oil lamps are lit in front of the images and their number is usually 3, 5 or 7. In each lamp there are 5 to 7 wicks pointing in different directions. Only coco-nut oil or *ghee* is used in these ceremonial lamps. In front of these lamps are placed three banana leaves with the cut end of the leaf facing the image and the tip pointing away from it, facing north or east. On one of the leaves some uncooked rice is placed and a husked coco-nut is kept over it, while in the other leaf unhusked paddy is heaped with a coco-nut placed on it. The eyes of the coco-nut are away from the snake idol and are towards the tip of the banana leaf. On the third leaf are placed a few small bananas of a special variety called *kadali*, because *kadali* is referred to in the Vedas.

The boiled rice offering is then placed near the shrine and some money is offered to the idol by dropping it in the oil of the lamp. These preparations are offered to the snake god who is supposed to partake of them. Thereafter the *prasad* or the offering is distributed among the members of the family, and the priest gets half of it. The *prasad* must not be eaten by a crow or dog as this is a bad omen. After the worship, the contents of the leaves are given to the priest who therefore takes great pains to see that this particular ceremony is well conducted.

Once a month or once every three months, low caste Hindus called Pulluvans visit the houses which have snake shrines. Usually they come on Tuesdays or Fridays, and they sing songs in praise of the snake gods. This is done in a rather crude manner to the accompaniment of crude single-stringed instruments called *veena kunju*. For this invocation, an oil lamp is lit before the shrine, and the above-mentioned three banana leaves and their respective contents are placed before the image of the serpent. Usually a woman accompanies the male singer and joins in the chorus, playing the while upon a crude drum. After the praise has been adequately rendered, the ceremony is brought to a close and the musician gets his share of money and materials. This ceremony is meant to propitiate and

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please the serpent god and to flatter him so that he may bear the welfare of the host in mind, and guard the family against disease, misfortune and harm accruing from human or supernatural agencies.

There are three important ceremonies in connection with serpent worship called *sarpa yaga*, *sarpa tulal* and *sarpa preeti*. They are conducted either at home or in the temple, usually on Sundays, since it is held that the serpents are most powerful and lenient on that day and are in a benign mood for granting favours.

Sarpa preeti is conducted in the house whenever misfortune occurs. The astrologer is consulted who decrees that a curse is upon the house and the serpents are angry. Thereupon elaborate worship is conducted with much ritual, and propitiation of the angered deities is effected and normalcy returns.

Sarpa tulal is a form of divine cure of the afflicted. The unfortunate victims of leprosy, mental or other diseases gather to worship the serpent gods praying for a cure. The priest conducts the worship and the afflicted go into a trance-like state and dance in religious fervour. Thereafter the priest throws consecrated turmeric powder on their heads and faces. The devotee feels blessed and cures are believed to occur.

Sarpa yaga is an annual festival in which many families jointly contribute to hold the ceremony. It is held usually for the collective prosperity of the village and lasts for two or three days. The afflicted and diseased persons dance in a trance for a long time and are given coco-nut water by the priest. At the end of the *puja* the priest sprinkles turmeric powder over the heads of the devotees and pours out holy water thrice in the palm of their hands.

One of the special attributes of snakes is their power over disease. The snake deities are specifically importuned for the prevention of skin diseases, stomach disorders, mental disturbances and for sterility. Leucoderma and leprosy are specially regarded as due to the curse of snakes who might have been angered by some unwitting disrespect shown towards them, or by accidental misdemeanour on the part of the inadvertant devotee. Of particular impor-

824 765 782 613 [775] [825] [231] place them in the bell-metal vessel in which the rice was boiled. The senior places the vessel on her head, and leads the way to a tank, on the banks of which the rice is thrown. It is hoped that crows will come and eat it; for if they do, the impression is received that the deceased's spirit is pleased with the offering; but if somehow it is thought that the crows will not come and eat it, the rice is thrown into the tank. Dogs are not to be allowed to eat it. The women bathe after the rice has been thrown away.

765 613 574 783 [824] When the ceremony which has been described has been performed for the seventh time, *i.e.*, on the seventh day after death, the piece of palmyra leaf is removed from the ground, and thrown on the ashes of the deceased at the place of cremation. During these seven days no member of the Taravâd goes to any other house. The house of the dead and all its inmates are under pollution: no outsider enters it but under ban of pollution, which is, however, removable by bathing. A visitor entering the house of the dead during these seven days must bathe before he can enter his own house. During these seven days the Kâranavan of the family receives visits of condolence from relatives and friends to whom he is "at home" on Monday, Wednesday or Saturday. They sit and chat, chew betel and go home, bathing ere they enter their houses.

[184] [431] It is said that in some parts of Malabar the visitors bring with them small presents in money or kind to help the Kâranavan through the expenditure to which the funeral rites necessarily put him.

765 613 To hark back a little, it must not be omitted that on the third day after the death, all those who are related by marriage to the Taravâd of the deceased combine and give a good feast to the inmates of the house and to the neighbours, who are invited, one man or one woman from each house. The person so invited is expected to come. This feast is called Patni Karigi. On the seventh day a return feast will be given by the Taravâd of the deceased to all relatives and neighbours.

[783] Between the seventh and fourteenth day after death no ceremony is observed; but the members of the Taravâd remain under death pollution, and then on the fourteenth day comes the Sanchayanam. It is the disposal of the calcined remains; the ashes of the deceased. The male members of the Taravâd go to the place of cremation and, picking up the pieces of unburnt bones which they find there, place these in an earthen pot which has been sun-dried—not burnt by fire in the usual way—cover up

All this over

the only thing to be done for the deceased is the annual shraddham, or yearly funeral commemorative rite. Rice balls (pindams) are made and given to crows. Clapping of hands announces to these birds that the rice is being thrown for them, and, should they come at once and eat it, it is obvious that the spirit of the deceased is pleased with the offering, and is not likely to be troublesome. But, on the other hand, should they not come and eat, it is evident that the spirit is displeased, and the Taravâd had better look out.

The ceremonial connected with the funeral rites which have been described, illustrates the immense difference which exists, as it does in the case of all peoples more or less cultured, between the primitive belief of the race, and the higher, the more abstract, religion which they believe they believe. With races, as with children, the earliest associations are the strongest, and persist through the life of the race as through the life of the individual. The higher power of reasoning which comes with higher development does not disperse them altogether. The people who practise these rites are good Hindus, and, according to the theory of their Hindu religion, the spirit which is emancipated from the body at death at once inhabits another body, for suffering or for enjoyment measured by the deserts of the bodily existence which has just ceased. This is the higher religion. And yet they admit that the spirit is connected with the shadow, not with the breath;—and feel in their hearts that it still lingers in the house and absorbs the essence of the ingredients of the food offered to it; that it must be propitiated or it will cause harm to the living. This is the primitive religion. It is supposed that the spirits of those whose ashes are deposited at Benares or other place of sanctity, and for whose sake alms are given to Brâhmans, remain at those holy spots, and become more and more god-like. This is a mixture of both. We are here concerned with facts rather than theories and, as much has been said already of this side of the subject of comparative religions, we may proceed with our facts. The spirits of those who have committed suicide or met death by any violent means are always particularly vicious and troublesome to the Taravâd, their spirit possessing and rendering miserable some unfortunate member of it. Unless pacified they will ruin the Taravâd, so Brâhman priests are called in and appease them by means of Tilahômam, a rite in which sacrifical fire is raised, and ghee, gingelly and other things are offered through it.

769 [825] 771 775 [822] [782] [766] [613] [782]

6:Fawcett G-5 (ca. 1900)1915
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this ceremony. Thus having purged their bodies of all worldliness they are taken into the ceremony and are seated as described before. Now by means of the *mantrams* and poojah the serpent gods are propitiated and in consequence they manifest themselves in the bodies of these female representatives of theirs. The entrance of the gods into their bodies is characterised by a fearful concussion of their whole frame, gradually developing into a ceaseless, shaking, particularly the upper parts. A few minutes afterwards, they begin to speak one by one and their speeches are regarded as expressions of the god's will. Sometimes the gods appear in the bodies of all these females and sometimes only in those of a select few or none at all. The refusal of the gods to enter into such persons is symbolical of some want of cleanliness and purity in them; which contingency is looked upon as a source of anxiety to the individual. It may also suggest the displeasure of these gods towards the family in respect of which the ceremony is performed. In either case, such refusal on the part of the gods is an index of their ill-will or dissatisfaction. In cases where the gods refuse to appear in any one of those seated for the purpose, the ceremony is prolonged until the gods are so properly propitiated as to constrain them to manifest themselves. Then after the lapse of the number of days fixed for the ceremony and after the will of the serpent gods is duly expressed the ceremonies close.

"One other small item of offering to these gods consists in certain ballads sung by the Pulluvar females going about from house to house at stated seasons of the year. They take a pretty large pitcher, close its opening by means of a small circular piece of thin leather which is fastened on to the vessel by means of strings strongly tied round its neck. Another string is adjusted to the leather cover which when played on by means of the fingers, produces a hoarse note which is said to please the god's ears, pacify their anger and lull them into sleep. This vessel is carried from house to house in the day time by these Pulluvar females; and placing the vessel in a particular position on the ground, and sitting in a particular fashion in relation to the vessel, they play on the string which then produces a very pleasing musical note. Then they sing ballads to the accompaniment of these notes. After continuing this for sometime they stop, and getting their customary dues from the family, go their own way. It is believed that these notes and the ballads are peculiarly pleasing to the serpent gods, who bless those for whose sakes the music has been rendered. In consequence of the halo of sanctity that has been popularly thrown round the serpent it is considered a sin of a most heinous nature to kill one of these deified reptiles. The killing of a cobra is regarded with the utmost concern amongst us. In such case the carcase is taken and duly burned with all

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776 the necessary solemn ceremonials. Sandalwood is the fuel used
766 sometimes. A small pit is dug which is covered with sandalwood
825 pieces and they are set fire to. When the flame burns intensely the body is quietly placed in it, and reduced to ashes together with, in some cases, incense and myrrh. This is believed to mitigate the dangers consequent on the death of the serpent.

776 "The popular conception of the family cobra is that it is a
825 tiny little thing with a full developed hood, and fangs, and possessing a golden tinge; which shine brilliantly in the rays of the sun. At the sight of human beings it gets away to its holy shrine exhibiting a reeling motion on its way thither. It never gets far away from its abode of which it is the perennial guardian.

564 "One striking phase of serpent worship in Malabar relates
776 to the family of Pappanmakkat Nambudris and the singular
825 and effective control they exercise over serpents in general. Their powers are handed from father to son. It is said that this Nambudri household is full of cobras which find their abode in every nook and corner of it. The inmates can scarcely move about without placing their feet upon any one of these serpents. Owing to the magic influence of the family the serpents cannot and will not injure them. The serpents are said to be always at the beck and call of the members of this Nambudri family and render unquestioned obedience to their commands. They watch and protect the interests of the family in the most jealous spirit. In short, these reptiles live, move, and have their being as freely as if they were domesticated animals imbued with supernatural powers.

[755] "Cases of cobra-poison are generally taken to this Brahman family and the headman sometimes summons before him the identical animal which caused injury and it is said successfully effects a cure as if by some mystic and magic influence.

825 "The serpent also plays a conspicuous part in contracts
425 between citizens. The family serpent is in old deeds the
776 subject-matter of sale. The sale of a house compound extends also to the family serpent. The stipulation in these documents invariably is that the family serpents are sold along with the properties; and even in cases of division of family property amongst its several branches of members, the family-serpent is included in the division. Such is the sacred prominence which has been given to the serpent amongst us. Their anger
[753] is said to manifest itself in some member of the family being
[982] struck down with leprosy or some other loathsome disease; while by their propitiation they can be converted into the guardian angels of our households, powerful enough to preserve the prosperity of the inmates as well as to vouchsafe their complete immunity from the attacks of virulent diseases and sometimes even from death."

made periodically to the serpent gods in the kavoos. The one I am describing here is one of the most important in Travancore. This is known as Mannārsāla. Once upon a time, so says tradition, a male member of this Illam married a girl of the Vettikkòttu Illam, where the serpents were held in great veneration. The girl's parents being poor could give her nothing in the way of dowry. They, therefore, gave her one of the stone idols of the serpent, of which there were many in their house. This stone idol the girl was counselled to take care of and regularly worship; subsequently it is said the girl became a mother and brought forth a boy and a snake, whereupon the snake-child was located in the underground cellar of the house and brought up. The Illam prospered from that day. The woman and the snake are believed to be the cause of the affluence of the family, and to this day to the surname of the male members of that Illom are added, by way of distinction, the names of the serpent-god and that of the female. Thus my informant, the present head of the family, is called Vasaki Sridévi Krishnan Nambyadi. To this gentleman I am indebted for the following further details on the snake-worship at Mannārsāla :—He says the name Mannārsāla means the 'unburnt ground.' This refers to an ancient tradition that when the great Khandavavanam was burnt by Agni, the god of fire, this small oasis was spared on the prayer of the serpents, who were the progeny of the serpent offspring of the lady of this Illam. As the Illam could not well accommodate the large number of the serpents that had multiplied, they were removed to a spot on the south of the house, where a magnificent grove has since been grown. In this spot are stone idols put up for the king and queen of snakes known as Nágarája and Nágayekshi, and for various members of the family which, according to my informant, number about 3,000. There are as many stone images in this grove now. In the cellar of the house, as well as in the grove where the stone images are placed, a solution of noorum palum is offered once a year, that is, on the day following the Sivarátri in the month of Másí. The same kind of offering is made to the Chittrakoodom also. About 12½ Edangalies of dough and milk are mixed together and kept in the cellar. Thereafter the door of the cellar is shut for three days, and lest anybody pry into what passes within the cellar, the women of the household cover the crevices and holes of the door

778 All the land about it, measuring a mile square, is said to
423 belong to it. This would be enormous property, as the
635 taluk where this kavoo is situated is one of the richest in Travancore. A trifle is given by the Sircar every year. If more funds are required, the Nambiyadi is expected to meet them from his own private income. The grove and its temples cover an immense oblong space measuring about 16 acres in extent. The inmates of the Illam are
688 the poojaries of the gods in this grove. It is believed
825 that whenever the poojah is not performed with the strictest personal purity or care to small details, the serpent gods get offended, which feeling is exhibited by
778 the largest cobras coming out of the grove. It should be
776 remembered that, as a rule, the serpents are not seen out
825 of their holes, though hundreds of them are known to exist in these large groves. When any is seen, especially if a real cobra, the village astrologer is consulted, who readily finds out the cause of the wrath of the serpent gods, and steps are taken immediately to pacify them by propitiatory ceremonies. The people believe in these ceremonies most implicitly. That is not a mere form with them. In a house in North Travancore, where
776 I lived some years, there used to be seen now and again
825 snakes of all kinds, and in answer to my request to the servant of my landlord to keep the kavoo neat, he invariably said, "Please, sir, order some lights and milk to the kavoo," for this man most sincerely believed that this was the only effective way of keeping out the snakes from view. He did not seem to believe that there was any good in keeping the premises neat and clean. It should here be noted that a true Hindu population never pelt at or harm the snakes when they are seen. They are objects of worship. One of our retired officials told me that some years ago, when he was young and new to the place, he was puzzled by some of the parties present at his cutcherry telling him that the 'god was coming.' The crowd made way, and on rising, this official was horrified to see that the god referred to was a live cobra. This village he spoke of, even now abounds with serpents, but strange to say, these reptiles
423 seldom harm man. They are evidently become domesti-
635 cated animals, for we seldom hear of snake-bites in that village, though the general belief is that there are more snakes there than rats. The people also seem to be quite at home with them, for they do not get put out when they see these reptiles."

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the season which makes their persons shiver and quiver like aspen-leaves before the breeze, becomes to them in the midst of all their ecstatic frolics an additional source of pleasure. In short, all these merely tend to brace them up to an extent the like of which they can scarcely find anywhere else. 796 [515]

"The two items described above, viz., the swinging process and the beating on the water, have each its own distinctive significance. The former typifies the attempt which these maidens make in order to hang themselves on these instruments and destroy their lives in consequence of the lamented demise of their sexual deity, Kamadevan. It is but natural that depth of sorrow will lead men to extreme courses of action. The beating on the water symbolizes their beating their chests in expression of their deep-felt sorrow caused by their Cupid's death. Such in brief is the description of a Nair festival which plays a conspicuous part in the social history of Malabar." [776]

Mr. Gopal Pannikar's chapter on "Local Traditions and Superstitions" ("Malabar and its Folk") has special value, for in it he recounts existing popular belief. He tells us that to demon labourers are attributed the existence of old dilapidated wells and buildings, demons who perform Herculean tasks under orders of a chief. One day these demons having finished their task disturbed their chief when he was playing a game of chess, coming to ask for more work, so he told them to count the waves of the sea; and this is why they are still at work. He tells us why the crow has a long life and the fowl a short one, and how that the former has but one eye, rolling in a socket; how it is that the common squirrel is marked on the back by the fingers of Vishnu; and much that is of interest about the screech owl, the lizard, the crocodile, and many other things. He recalls to my mind the popular belief accounting for the unluckiness which will follow should one see the moon on the Chadûrti night, which I have heard in North Malabar. My note was somehow mislaid. It is that the big-bellied god Ganapati was once upon a time returning home in the moonlight after a repast so generous that his person was much distended, and unable to see his feet, he tripped and stumbled. He looked around to see whether any one had observed his discomfiture. There was no one but the moon. The moon laughed, whereupon he cursed the moon. Hence the belief that whoever sees the moon on that night will be unlucky, probably defamed. Mr. Gopal Panniker, a native of South Malabar, does not mention it, but in North Malabar women are scrupulously careful not to see the moon or be for a moment in the moonlight 77 [825] [777] [821] 776 821 [184]

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The *Santâna gópâlam* yantram. As a whole, it represents Sri Krishna. The letters in it (there are 101) put together in a certain way form a mantram. It is used by barren women so that they may bear children. It may be traced on a metal plate and worn in the usual way, or on a slab of butter which is then eaten. When the latter method is adopted it is repeated on 41 successive days, during which the woman as well as the Panikkar may not have sexual connection.

The *Srî Sûkra* yantram is another used by childless men and women in order to obtain offspring. The others are prophylactic against evil spirits (chiefly), to defeat enemies, to succeed in all undertakings and prevent loss of property by theft, to win over the good feeling of others, and so on. The *Sudarsana* yantram not only relieves sickness, but when drawn in 5 colours on the ground and worshipped while repeating a mantram (too long to quote) wards off the evil influence caused through black magic! Another, the *Navva* yantram, drawn in ashes of cowdung on a new cloth which is then tied round the waist, relieves a women in labour. Yet another, the *Asvârûdha* yantram (Asva, horse; ârûḍha, to climb) would also be useful to some people, as a person wearing it is able to cover long distances easily on horseback; and he may make the most refractory horse amenable by tying it round its neck. It will also help to cure sick cattle. In some the letters or syllables form a distinct mantram, while in others each has its own mystic meaning.

Let me hasten to assure any one desirous of applying one of these charms to himself that they are entirely inoperative unless accompanied in the first place with the mystic rite which is the secret of the Panikkar.

Magic—The Evil Eye.—One day as I reached my camp in the Kôttayam taluk, North Malabar, my ears were assailed by the din of incessant drumming hard by. In the evening I was able to see and converse with the drummer, Châtu by name, aged 23, by caste Malayan. The Malayans are hereditary professional magicians, few in number, inferior in the social scale. They are not the only magicians. We have seen already (Bulletin, Volume III, No. 1, page 50) that some of the Nambûtiri Brahmans practise magic; but to the Malayan the Nâyar appears as often as to any other kind of mantram-man.

Châtu was delightfully communicative. He had been putting away the effects of the evil eye from one of his clientèle;—hence the din. In effect he said: certain

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magic. Fortunately, by the kindness of Mr. U. Balakrishnan Nâyar, these blanks have been filled up in the translation which he has obtained for me—from *one who knows*.

I will give here an excerpt from it, which is fairly representative of the sympathetic side of magic such as is common in Malabar. It is not, I think, concerned with sympathetic or symbolic magic exclusively, as, unless I am much mistaken, an evil spirit is here also invoked. It is within the domain of black magic, in which, I think, an evil spirit is always made to help if not to work the evil.

It describes how to cause certain pains in the body of another. A mantram is written (here, I think, an evil spirit is called up, though such does not appear to be said), on the stem of the kâitha plant. The stem should be the length of eight fingers. A figure representing the person to be injured is (also) drawn on the stem. A hole is bored to represent the navel. The mantram is repeated, and at each repetition a certain thorn (kâra mollu) is fixed into the limbs of the figure. The name of the person and of the star under which he was born are written on a piece of cadjan leaf, which is stuck into the hole representing the navel. The thorns are stuck in 21 times; that is, removed and replaced 21 times. Two magic circles are drawn below the nipple on the figure. The stem is then hung up in the smoke of the kitchen. A pot of toddy and some other accessories are procured, and with these certain rites are performed by the warlock. When he has concluded them, he moves three steps backwards. He shouts aloud thrice, fixing in again the thorns, thinking all the while of the particular mischief with which he would afflict the person to be injured.

When all this has been done, the person whose figure has been drawn on the stem and pricked with thorns, feels pain as if *he* were being pricked with thorns.

The grandha describes also how an enemy may be stuck dumb. The head of a dark coloured fowl is cut off. The head is then split, and a piece of cadjan on which are written a mantram, the name of the person to be injured, and the name of the star under which he was born, is stuck into the split head which is then sewn up, taking care to stitch the tongue to the beak. The head is then inserted in a certain fruit, which, after being tied up with a withe of a certain creeper nine spans in length, is deposited under the enemy's gateway.

In it, too, we are told how to win over a man, or a quarrelsome husband; how to quiet refractory cows which

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is from the Sanskrit work *Nayaka*, meaning leader. As such a derivation flatters the national vanity of the community it has been accepted without question. The utter absurdity of the idea that the people who call themselves Aryans (as the Brahmins of Malabar still do) and look down upon the rest from a point of view of racial superiority, can have given them this proud title, never seems to have suggested itself. Moreover, the Aryan settlers of Malabar asserted a spiritual as well as temporal superiority over the Nāyars, which goes far to disprove the theory of the derivation of the word from *Nayaka*, or Lord.

It seems unquestionable, on the other hand, that the word *Nāyar* is the same as *Nagar*. As the totem names seem to have been imposed on the community from outside it seems reasonable to suppose that this serpent-worshipping people were called by their neighbours *Nagar* or serpent-men. That the Nāyars in ancient days were a totemic clan, is easy to see from the fact that every Nāyar family still holds the serpent sacred. Thus it will not cut down a *Kavu*, or serpent grove, as it is the place where the family serpents reside. It is, of course, natural that in a community of 3½ million souls the same solidarity of totemic feeling, as it exists, say, among the turtle clan, cannot have existed.

M. S. Reinach, in defining totemism as distinct from fetishism, says that the totem is a class of objects regarded by a tribe or clan as tutelary or protective in the widest sense of the word. Take the case of a clan with a serpent totem; the members will call themselves serpents, claim descent from a serpent, abstain from killing serpents, etc. Not only do the Nāyars still show traces of having done all this, but they continue to perform with undiminished zeal *Nagathān* (*thān* is an honorific suffix) *pattus*, or prayers and songs, to the sacred serpents. When anything goes wrong the astrologer generally finds something done to offend the sacred serpents. There is one singular case where a man, without heeding the warnings of all his people, went and cleared a serpent grove, and the result was that he died six days later. In popular opinion, this was without doubt due to the wrath of the serpents.

From all this it seems quite clear that before the Aryan invasion the Nāyars were a community with a *Naga* or serpent totem. This is supported by evidence from Ceylon also. Ceylon chronicles mention that when the Buddha visited the island for the second time (second century B.C.) he found the northern part peopled by Nagas who were fighting with the Yakshas, or the original inhabitants of the land.[1] This is without doubt an emigration of S. Indian people to Ceylon, probably as a result of Aryan pressure from the North. The descendants of these Nagas of Ceylon, it must be noticed, bear a close similarity to the Nāyars in matters of social life. Among their customs may be specially noticed: (*a*) the elasticity or rather the slenderness of the marriage tie which permits the discarding, without any disgrace attached to it, of undesirable husbands or wives; (*b*) the remarriage of such widows

[1] See Parker, *Ancient Ceylon*. London, 1909, p. 16.

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and one with less than that number was called a *Désavázhi*. There were in those days no taxes levied from the people, and the chief from the Rajas down to the *Désavázhi* possessed demesne lands for their support which were cultivated either by themselves or leased to *kudiyáns* or tenants; but the following were the chief sources of income, based upon feudal rights and privileges. The rulers levied custom duties upon exports and imports, taxes upon houses of fishermen, tradesmen and professional men. Criminal fines went to fill their coffers, and succession duties were levied upon the estates of deceased persons, especially those who held offices of State or rights over land. Outcast women were made a two-fold source of profit. Lewd adulterous women were made over to the chiefs with a premium for the trouble of looking after them, and the chiefs used in turn to sell the women to foreign merchants as slaves or wives to *Chettis*. The estates of persons who died without heirs were escheated, nor could an heir be adopted without the Raja's consent, for which a fee was generally levied. Protection fees from strangers and merchants were levied under various names and customary presents were the ruler's dues on occasions of feast or funeral. Wrecks were his perquisites, and various animals his monopoly. Concerning the former, Marco Polo wrote about the kingdom of Eli, "And you must know that if any ship enters the estuary and anchors when she has been bound for some other port, they seize her and plunder the cargo. They say that you are bound somewhere else, and it is God that sent you hither to us, so we have a right to all your goods, and think it no sin to act thus. This naughty custom prevails all over the Provinces of India, to wit, that if a ship be driven by a stress of weather into some other port than that to which it is bound, it is sure to be plundered. But if a ship came bound originally to the place, they received it with all honour and gave it protection."[1] The custom of the taking of ships and cargoes lasted down to recent times, until the English factory at Tellicherry entered into agreements with three of the country-powers for the exemption of English vessels from such seizures.

Among the animals that became the property of the Raja were cows with three or five dugs, cattle that has killed a man or other animals, cattle with a white spot near the corner of

1. Yulies Marco Polo, page 374.

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the eye, buffaloes with white tips to their tails, wild elephants caught in traps and wild hogs that had fallen into wells.

Even in social matters, these chieftains had supreme powers. In the settlement of marriages in any part of the country, the Nayars had to obtain the chieftain's sanction who held sway over the particular locality. The custom is even now in vogue though in a visibly weakened form. In the celebration of a *Kettu kalyánam* or *sambandham* in any part of the country, the parties concerned visited the chieftain and bought his consent with presents. For without such consent no settlement and celebration thereafter could be arranged. His consent had to be procured even for the holding of festivals.

The chieftain's powers were so great that, if a wife living with her husband proved an object of attraction to another, adequate presents to the chieftain would buy him a formal writ, giving him the rights of a husband over that woman. Thus even so late as only a generation or two ago, the chieftain's power was exercised in the encouragement of polyandry.

When a tali-tying ceremony had to be performed for a girl of any decent family in a locality, she was taken to the local chieftain with a nuzzar or *tirumulkázhcha* and other things prepared for the festival that was to follow. In return the girl was given a golden bracelet which she was authorised to wear in his presence. No girl who had not received such a one could wear it.

In certain parts of the State people were afraid to erect buildings of more than one storey, lest they should incur the inexorable wrath of the chieftain; nor were they allowed to tile thatched houses. Departures from these customs were allowed only with the consent of the chieftain, embodied in a writ issued by him. In rural parts even to this day such restrictions are not totally inoperative. In the State His Highness the Raja gives his sanction in regard to some social matters even to this day and Nambutiri landlords exercise a similar authority among the tenants occupying their lands. Certain kinds of conveyances such as palanquins and dholies were reserved only for chieftains while the *Pallichans* were the only people who were employed to carry them. Various titles [1]

1. Vide pages 18-20.

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belief in animism, and all these are largely mixed up with the religion of the Nayars. Animism refers to the belief that man passes through life surrounded by a ghastly company of powers, elements, and tendencies, impersonal in character, mere shapeless phantoms of which no image can be made and no idea can be formed. Most of these have departments or spheres of influence of their own—one presides over cholera, another over small-pox, yet another over cattle disease, some dwell in rocks, others haunt trees, and others again haunt rivers, whirlpools and waterfalls. All of them require to be diligently propitiated by reason of the ills and calamities which they bring about, and the essence of these practices is magic.

Evidence of a wide-spread belief in the worship of ancestors is to be seen in the kistavens (*thoppi kallús*)—the rock caves containing the sepulchral urns found in the jungles and other parts of the State—in the ceremonies performed and the offerings made for the spirits of the dead. They are worshipped even now in special *kávús*, sometimes even in small out-houses or special rooms in the house on new moon days or *Sankrántis*, and there are also periodical commemorations on the anniversaries of the ancestor's death. Dead ancestors are also represented by stones or small images of gold or silver kept in the middle room of the Nayar houses, and offerings of food and drink are made to them on new moon and *Sankránti* nights. Animistic again is the worship of Káli or Bhagavati who presides over small-pox, cholera, and the thousand maladies that flesh is heir to, the worship of animals and plants and lastly the belief in exorcism and witchcraft in which Brahmans also share.

Serpent worship.

Serpent shrines (*Núgattún kávús* or *Nagakóttas*) are to be found in the compounds of every Nayar house in the Cochin State, and their worship occupies a prominent place in the religious life of the Nayars and other castes. The following mythical origin is ascribed to the adoration of serpents in the Keralólpathi.

The first Aryan colonists settled by Parasurama found Kerala absolutely uninhabitable, and finding it impossible to improve their condition, returned to their old country. After their departure, the Nágas (or serpent gods) of the lower world or *Páthála* took possession of the partly reclaimed land and settled

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thereon. The early colonists, on a second venture, finding the land occupied, commenced a war against the Nágas, but Parasurama acting as arbitrator, decided in favour of the early colonists, and ordered that they should set apart a corner of every compound as an abode of the serpent gods. He further ordained that these allotted places were to remain virgin-ground, untouched by the blade of the knife or the prong of the fork, while the under-wood and the creepers were to be allowed to grow in wild profusion, and to such the name *kávu* (grove) was given. In it are generally planted several stone idols of serpents placed on a stone-basement called *chitrakúdam*, the whole being held sacred and reserved by a low wall round it to prevent cattle or children straying into that space. The propitiation of serpents is deemed essential to the prosperity and well-being of every house-holder, and periodical offerings are made to them, while the neglect of these is considered to cause leprosy, sterility, or ophthalmia, among the members of the family. These serpents are therefore regarded as tutelary deities of the family, and the gods along with the shrines are conveyed with the property and frequently specified in deeds of transfer.

The high priest of the serpent cult is the Pámbu Mékkát Nambuthiri, who lives in a house full of cobras which are said to be harmless to his family. Whenever an image of a serpent from a grove has to be removed from one place to another, he is sent for on the belief that he alone can do it after due propitiation and offerings, and any tree that is cut down for this removal must be sent to the local temple to be used as fuel. The serpent grove should not be polluted by a member of the low caste, or by a woman during her menses; and when it is so polluted or otherwise spoiled, a member of the family of the Nambuthiri priest has to be informed. He gazes into a vessel filled with oil, points out the evil and suggests the remedy. The ninth asterism in every month is specially selected for snake worship in Nayar families, when offerings of milk and water are made to them. It is said that the approach of a woman during her menses will cause serpents to vacate the grove because of the impurity, and Pulluvans are required to sing songs and perform certain ceremonies to cause them to re-enter the shrines. Images of these serpents are sometimes

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made even of gold or silver and consecrated for worship in Brahman houses. They are also presented to Brahmans by those on whose date of birth an eclipse falls, and this is done to mitigate the wrath of Ráhu.

Cases of snake bite are of frequent occurrence in the northern parts of the State where snakes abound; and nowhere else is the Hindu treatment so skillfully practised as to effect a radical cure by medicines and incantations. When information regarding snake bite isconveyed to a physician, or a bitten man is taken to him, the latter can, by the chirping of a lizard or other tokens, make out the nature of the case and also whether it is curable or not. It is said that physicians should not go to a patient's house, and the following story is given in explanation :—

Once when the emperor Parikshit was ordained to be bitten by the great serpent Takshaka, the latter set out in the disguise of a Brahman. On his way he met another Brahman, who, on enquiry, turned out to be a physician on his way to cure the king. With a view to test his ability, Takshaka bit a tree which was at once reduced to ashes, but the physician removed the poison, and the tree regained its former state. Takshaka, admiring his ability, loaded him with immense wealth and dissuaded him from going to the king. He also made him promise that he should never volunteer his services in such matters unless patients were taken to him. In some families the profession is hereditary, the most prominent among them beingt he families of Kokkára Nambuthiri and Máliyakal Karta.

Tutelary deities.

In every village are to be found guardian deities that protect the villagers from the malevolence of demons which are supposed to occupy an intermediate place between gods and men. The temples of the Nayars in which are enshrined these village deities or *Grámadévatas* are far less imposing than those of the Brahmans and are callad *kávus*. The deities commonly represented are the consort of Siva or some manifestation of that female divinity, and Ayyappan or Sasta; and these are supposed to keep in subjection the demons and spirits which are ever prone to do harm to the people of the village. Thus, though the demons are objects of worship, the propitiation of the guardian deities and the festivals held in their honour are considered to be sufficient to curb

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time. At the period of puberty and after child-birth women are especially liable to the attacks of these aërial beings. Charms and incantations, offerings and sacrifices, are the most requisite to counteract the evils that demons do, and iron rings, iron staffs, and leather shoes, are some of the specifics that help to keep the demons at a distance.

They make their abode chiefly in the palmyra and *pála* trees, but some of them occupy even dwelling houses. Others take the shape of human beings, while yet others possess human beings.

Their name is legion, and they exist by the offerings of their votaries and their tormented victims. Against the machinations of these demons, the sorcerers and exorcists bring to bear the influence of their special guardian deities who in turn must be propitiated with offerings before they can be called upon to use their beneficial strength. In the case of the evil spirit of him who has died an unnatural death, a Brahman magician purifies the spirit by means of certain ceremonies called *Tilahóma* (an offering of sesamum seeds to *agni* or fire). A Chendus Nambuthiri presides at such ceremonies and transfers the spirit to an image of gold, silver, or wood which is afterwards placed in a Vishnu temple or enshrined in a small building put up for that purpose, there to rest in peace.

In the State, temples are dedicated to various demons, the chief among them being the Avanangáttil Cháttan in Triprayar. The temples dedicated to the small-pox demon correspond to the *Péy Kóvils* or devil temples of the Tamil Districts. In these temples are to be found the instruments and symbols of demon worship, the dancing sticks or wands, the priests' garments, tridents, etc., whilst in others there is nothing save the images of demons. There is also an officiating priest, who is the devil driver and the devil dancer, and who at times even becomes a *Velichapád* inspired to communicate to the votaries, who consult him in times of illness and calamity, the wishes and intentions of that particular demon.

Worship of animals and plants.

To a Hindu all organic life is sacred, and his creed is not to injure any living thing, while among the animals worshipped by him the cow occupies the first place. The cow is *Kámadhénu*, the giver of all things, and hence whenever a cow is approached, it is touched

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with the hand which is, in token of veneration, then raised to the head. Milk, curd, ghee, urine and dung are mixed together and used for purificatory ceremonies; and the images of gods are anointed with this holy mixture called *panchagavyam*. Small doses of it are even taken internally, and it is considered an antidote against poison, besides being prescribed as a *prâyaschit* or expiation for offences against caste, whereas the sprinkling of water mixed with dung removes sin or pollution from all persons, places, or things, and purifies them. The bull, the vehicle of Siva, is also held sacred, and a statue of it in granite is either placed in front of the image of Siva or in a separate shrine, and is worshipped as a God. The lizard associated with Siva, the monkey with Hanumán, the Garuda (the brahmany kite) with Vishnu, and the peacock of Subramania are a few of the other animals of Hindu veneration.

Of the birds of ill omen, one species of owl called *pullu* is much dreaded because of the belief that it causes an illness to children which results in emaciation. At the sound of its screeching, children are taken into a room to avoid its injurious gaze. Various are the propitiatory ceremonies performed by specialists to secure its good-will and to prevent its doing harm to babies; and amulets are worn by children as a preventive against its evil influences. Its hideous screeches are always associated with death.

Among trees, some are worshipped while others are used for *pûjas* or sacrifices. Among the former may be mentioned the pipal (Ficus religiosa), a tree which is held in veneration by the Hindus. Persons afflicted with maladies or whose planets are unfavourable, go round a pipal tree, seven, twelve, forty-one, or one hundred and eight times, muttering prayers and burning camphor and other incense at its foot or perchance engage Brahmans to do so, in the belief, that it will cure disease or counteract evil influences. The *vilva* (Ægle marmelos), whose leaf of triple form is supposed to represent the three eyes of Siva, and symbolise his triple function of production, destruction, and re-production, and the *tulsi* (Ocymum sanctum), which is sacred to Vishnu, are also worshipped. In front of every house, generally on the eastern side, or in the central yard of a quadrangular structure, is a stone or mud altar, on which *tulsi* or the *vilva* is planted and watered every day, and is worshipped by the inmates of the house. From

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From the *tulsi* are also made rosaries, which, in addition to being an aid to prayers, are also used as ornaments for the neck. Among the trees used for *pûjas* or sacrifices are the sandal-wood, the *pâlâsu* (Butea frondosa), the *rudrâksham* (Elæocarpus lanceolatus), the *darbha* (Poa cynosuroides), the *karuka* (Agrostis linearis), the *thumba* (Leucas Indica), *chembarutti* (shoeflower, Hibiscus Rosa sinensis), *erikku* (Calotropis gigantea), *thechi* (Chrysanthemum), and the several species of lotus and jessamine; and of these one and all are extensively used for medicinal purposes.

Folk-tales.

The belief in demons and the habit of attributing all that cannot be easily accounted for to supernatural powers, have built up an edifice of folk-tales that would prove of great interest to students of folk-lore, some of which are given below:—

The eclipse is ascribed to the devouring of the sun or moon by the huge serpent Râhu, and while it lasts, a kind of pollution is observed by the people, for during the period of eclipse, food and drink are supposed to acquire poisonous properties.

People who hear stories of Rámáyana, while lying on their beds, will become blades of grass in their next birth.

Will-o'-the-wisps are accounted for, as lights emitted by a kind of precious stone (*mânikka kallu*) from the mouths of serpents, which, owing to their long life, are believed to have acquired the art of flying. Popular belief is that some serpents have been blowing for ages upon gold, embedded in the strata of the earth, and converting it into precious stones of the nature above mentioned. They keep them in their mouths, and acquire the power of flying in the air, with the stones shining brilliantly when they open their mouths.

When the crow and the fowl were first created, they were asked which they preferred, personal beauty or long life. The fowl preferred the former, and the crow the latter. Hence it is that the crow is said to possess a long lease of life.

The crow is supposed to possess only one eye, though apparently it has two. One eye-ball is said to move first in one socket, then into the other as necessity requires. The story is connected with a strange myth.

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During the exile of Rama, Lakshmana and Sita, they lived chiefly by hunting. One day, when Sita was drying some pieces of flesh, a crow accidentally pecked at one of Sita's ruddy toes, taking it for one of the blood red pieces of meat. She thereupon told her husband about it, who shot an arrow at the crow and blinded it in one eye, and thenceforth its descendants have been blind in one eye.

When the great Rama was constructing the dam across the sea, for his large army to cross over to Lanka (Ceylon) to wage war with the *Asura*, Ravana, and to recover his wife Sita, a small squirrel was found working hard without food. This attracted the notice of the great Rama who took pity on him and gently rubbed him on the back with three fingers as a sign of affection, and the impressions thus left became the black and white lines, which the whole species possessed thereafter.

Ari-pravu or the common house-dove has a story told of it. These birds, male and female, are always found in pairs together. Once, it is said, they were quarrelling about a game, and the quarrel ended in the desertion by the male bird of his mate, who recognizing the mistake called for him, and her cries are said to be ever calling out for her mate.

Rain, Thunder and Lightning:—In the aërial regions are huge monsters of extraordinary strength (*Kálaméghattanmár*) who are supposed to possess two horns with the aid of which all the water from the earth is drawn up during the summer, to be spat out in the rainy season at Indra's (Rain God's) bidding. Lightning is caused by the friction of the horns, while engaged in the task of spitting out water. Another version of the story as to the origin of lightning is, that it is caused by the brandishing of Indra's sword, while engaged in ordering the monsters to supply the earth with water.

It is said that a new lobe grows on to the liver of a tiger every year it lives, and therefore by an examination of that organ, the age of the animal can be accurately determined.

Evil spirits are believed to have the power at times of changing men into tigers, such being distinguished by having no tails.

The claws and even the teeth of the tiger are used as charms against witchcraft and the evil-eye. They may frequently be seen set in silver, and worn round the necks of

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[789] children. Tiger's whiskers have also the same efficacy against
[825] demoniacal influence. The flesh is eaten as medicine, while
[757] the skin boiled in gingelly oil and strained into the ear, removes deafness.

539 There is a common belief that, should the nest of a brah-
825 many kite be found, and one of the young ones be attached to it by a string, the squall breaks away, generally leaving a portion of the line attached to the nest as it becomes strong. The
[789] nest which is formed of sticks should then be thrown into a running stream, when, if any of the sticks that compose it float against the current, they will, on being applied to any fetters, cause them immediately to fly into a thousand fragments.

[171] The owl which is an emblem of wisdom in Europe, and the goose that of stupidity, completely change their respective places in the east, the former becoming a symbol of stupidity, the latter that of wisdom.

[787] The hooting of the owl heard at night, has, in all parts of the world and in all ages, been considered ominous of
[763] evil, and is consequently much dreaded. In Cochin, it is generally believed, that the hooting of an owl betokens an impending calamity or even the death of an individual near whose abode its loathsome cry is heard; and so, dwellers in the neighbouring houses at once turn out and drive it away.

824 Jack-o'-lantern:—These are called *Kollykatta Pisáchus*
539 (ghosts which emit fire from their mouths), and make their
[776] appearance on the side of tanks, rivers, and marshy places during rainy or foggy nights. They fly away or disappear at the sight of men and are much dreaded by the people.

Preëminent among the trees in the town of Cochin, and towering above all others along the sea-shore and sides of the back-water are the cocoanut palms (cocos nucifera linn), every portion of which, from the leaves to the roots, may be turned to some useful purpose.

[776] There is a tradition that the Raja of Benares, who was a stre-
[643] nuous worshipper of one supreme God, and rejected the custom of making offerings to inferior divinities, became, in course of time, almost equal to the Gods, and created many of the grains now in common use. As his powers increased, so did his ambition, and he meditated creating another species of human beings very superior to anything then existing in the world. But after he had completed its head, the demi-gods became alarmed and

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765 surface. The men, when they return from their baths, bring
782 with them some harialli grass (*karukapullu*); and making an
613 obeisance with the right knee on the ground, they spread some grass near the strip of palmyra leaf, and rings made of the leaf are also worn by all those present. The eldest of the *anandaravans* or nephew then makes offerings of water, turmeric and leaves of the *cherula*, as well as balls of boiled rice with a few gingelly grains and curds poured over it. As boys are forbidden to make the offerings, should the nephew chance to be a boy, it is considered sufficient for him to touch one of the elders who, under those circumstances, makes the offerings. The whole is then covered with a plantain leaf, a lighted wick is waved near it, and some milk is poured under the leaf. This is left undisturbed for some seconds, after which the leaf is tapped gently with the back of the fingers of the right hand; it is then removed and torn in two at its mid-rib, one piece being placed on either side of the *pindams*. And now the ceremony is over for the day. The agnates rise and remove their wet clothing, sometimes even bathe again. The torn cloth is tied round a pillar near the basket covering the leaf, and the leaf is uncovered every day for seven days at the same hour for the performance of the ceremony. At the end of each day's ceremony the offerings of rice balls left are unguarded for a short time to allow the crows to feed on them; after which they are removed by the female members of the *tarawád*, who are junior to the deceased, and the eldest of them carries the offerings to the side of a tank
[825] and throws them into the water. It is believed that if the
[775] crows take them, the spirit is pleased. Should the crows leave
[231] any remains, they must be thrown into the water, as dogs must not eat the offerings.

765 During the seven days the house of the deceased and all
783 its inmates are considered to be under pollution, and the mem-
613 bers of that *tarawad* may not go to any other house nor can
574 members of other *tarawáds* visit them without polluting themselves; but this pollution can be removed by bathing. During this period, however, as a rule, the *káranavan* of the family receives visits of condolence from relatives and friends to whom he is at home on Mondays, Wednesdays and Saturdays.

Here it must be said, that in some cases, the visitors bring with them small presents in money or in kind to help the *káranavan* with the expenditure to which the funeral rites put him.

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[782] and gingelly seeds every morning after his bath to the departed spirit, and he must abstain from women, meat, alcoholic drinks, and from chewing betel and tobacco. When the *Deeksha* is observed, the ashes of the dead are not deposited as described above until the last day of *Deeksha*, the forty-first or the 365th day after death. When *Deeksha* is observed for a year, the ceremony called *bali* is performed every day. The last day of *Deeksha* is one of festivity, and after *bali*, the man under *Deeksha*
769 is shaved. Then at the end of every year, the annual *Sradha*
[782] or the commemorative rite is performed for the deceased.
[825] Rice ball offerings are made and given to the crows, when clapping of hands announces to these birds that the rice is being thrown for them, and should they come and eat it, it is considered that the spirit of the deceased is pleased with the
[613] offering and is not likely to be troublesome. But, on the other hand, should they not come and eat it, it is evident that the spirit is displeased and the *tarawád* had better be on the look
766 out. In the case of those who have committed suicide or met
775 death by violent means, the spirits are always particularly
613 vicious and troublesome to the *tarawád*, invariably rendering
782 miserable some unfortunate member of it. Unless the spirits are pacified, they will ruin the family, so a Brahman priest is invited to satisfy them by means of *Tilahómam*, a rite in which sacrificial fire is raised, and ghee and gingelly seeds are among the offerings.

on her head, and lets it trickle down two or three hairs to her navel, where it is caught in a plate. Then the girl and her brother, holding hands, dig a hole with the charakkōl and pisankatti, and plant the tamarind branch in the nadumittam, and water it. Then the juice is administered. Until she is confined, the girl waters the tamarind branch, and offers rice, flowers, and lighted wicks to it three times a day. When labour begins, she uproots the branch."

"At delivery," Mr. Balakrishnan Nāyar writes, "women of the barber caste officiate as midwives. In some localities, this is performed by Vēlan caste women. Pollution is observed for fifteen days, and every day the mother wears cloths washed and presented by a woman of the Vannān [or Tīyan] caste. On the fifteenth day is the purificatory ceremony. As in the case of death pollution, a man of the Aṭiṭkurissi clan sprinkles on the woman a liquid mixture of oil and the five products of the cow (pānchagavya), with gingelly (*Sesamum*) seeds. Then the woman takes a plunge-bath, and sits on the ground near the tank or river. Some woman of the family, with a copper vessel in her hands, takes water from the tank or river, and pours it on the mother's head as many as twenty-one times. This done, she again plunges in the water, from which she emerges thoroughly purified. It may be noted that, before the mother proceeds to purify herself, the new-born babe has also to undergo a rite of purification. It is placed on the bare floor, and its father or uncle sprinkles a few drops of cold water on it, and takes it in his hands. The superstitious believe that the temperament of the child is determined by that of the person who thus sprinkles the water. All the members of the taravād observe pollution for fifteen days following the delivery, during

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which has just been described. Now, when it has been completed, he ties the piece of cloth to the pillar of the house nearest to the piece of palmyra leaf which has been stuck in the ground, and puts the piece of iron in a safe place. The piece of palmyra leaf is covered with a basket. It is uncovered every day for seven days at the same hour, while the same ceremony is repeated. The balls of rice are removed by women and girls of the taravād who are junior to the deceased. They place them in the bell-metal vessel in which the rice was boiled. The senior places the vessel on her head, and leads the way to a tank, on the bank of which the rice is thrown. It is hoped that crows will come and eat it; for, if they do, the impression is received that the deceased's spirit is pleased with the offering. But, if somehow it is thought that the crows will not come and eat it, the rice is thrown into the tank. Dogs are not to be allowed to eat it. The women bathe after the rice has been thrown away. When the ceremony which has been described has been performed for the seventh time, *i.e.*, on the seventh day after death, the piece of palmyra leaf is removed from the ground, and thrown on the ashes of the deceased at the place of cremation. During these seven days, no member of the taravād goes to any other house. The house of the dead, and all its inmates are under pollution. No outsider enters it but under ban of pollution, which is, however, removable by bathing. A visitor entering the house of the dead during these seven days must bathe before he can enter his own house. During these seven days, the Karanavan of the family receives visits of condolence from relatives and friends to whom he is "at home" on Monday, Wednesday or Saturday. They sit and chat, chew betel, and go home, bathing ere they enter their houses. It is said

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613 alcoholic drinks, and from chewing betel, also from
765 tobacco. When the dīksha is observed, the ashes of the
[784] dead are not deposited as described already (in the sun-
[834] dried vessel) until its last day—the forty-first or a year after death. When it is carried on for a year, there is observed every month a ceremony called bali. It is noteworthy that, in this monthly ceremony and for the conclusion of the dīksha, it is not the thirtieth or three hundred and sixty-fifth day which marks the date for the ceremonies, but it is the day (of the month) of the star which was presiding when the deceased met his death: the returning day on which the star presides.* For the
[514] bali, a man of the Elayatu caste officiates. The Elayatus
[793] are priests for the Nāyars. They wear the Brāhmin's thread, but they are not Brāhmins. They are not permitted to study the Vēdas, but to the Nāyars they
[782] stand in the place of the ordinary purōhit. The officiating Elayatu prepares the rice for the bali, when to the deceased, represented by karuka grass, are offered boiled rice, curds, gingelly seeds, and some other
[465] things. The Elayatu should be paid a rupee for his services, which are considered necessary even when the man under dīksha is himself familiar with the
[302] required ceremonial. The last day of the dīksha is one of festivity. After the bali, the man under dīksha is shaved. All this over, the only thing to be done for the deceased is the annual srādh or yearly funeral commemorative rite.
[825] Rice-balls are made, and given to crows. Clapping of
[775] hands announces to these birds that the rice is being thrown for them, and, should they not come at once and eat, it is evident that the spirit is displeased, and the taravād had better look out. The spirits of those who

[805] * All caste Hindus who perform the srādh ceremonies calculate the day of death, not by the day of the month, but by the thithis (day after full or new moon).

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[782] day of Makarom (January-February), and on some Tuesdays and Fridays. Kolam-tullal, Velan-pravarti, Ayiramaniyam-tullel, Chavuttu, Tila-homam, and a host of other ceremonies are performed with a view to propitiate spirits, and the assistance of the Kaniyans
● [825] and Vēlans is largely sought. Serpents, too, whose images are located on the north-western side of most gardens in Central and North Travancore, receive a
[821] large share of adoration. The sun is an object of
[782] universal worship. Though the Gayatri cannot be studied, or the Sandhyavandanam of the Brāhmans performed, an offering of water to the sun after a bath, to the accompaniment of some hymn, is made by almost every pious Nāyar. The Panchakshara is learnt from
538 an Ilayatu, and repeated daily. A large portion of the
[517] time of an old Nāyar is spent in reading the Rāmayana, Bhagavata and Mahābharata, rendered into Malayālam by Tunchattu Ezhuttachhan, the greatest poet of the Malabar coast. Many places in Travancore are pointed out as the scene of memorable incidents in the Rāmayana and Mahābharata. There are many temples, tanks, and mountains connected with Rāma's march to the capital of Rāvana. Equally important are the singular feats said to have been performed by the five Pāndavas during the time of their wanderings in the jungles before the battle of Kurukshetra. Bhima especially has built temples, raised up huge mountains, and performed many other gigantic tasks in the country. There are some village temples owned exclusively by the Nāyars, where all the karakkars (villagers) assemble on special
623 occasions. A very peculiar socio-religious ceremony per-
178 formed here is the kūttam. This is a village council,
574 held at the beginning of every month for the administration of the communal affairs of the caste, though, at

the present day, a sumptuous feast at the cost of each villager in rotation, and partaken of by all assembled, and a small offering to the temple, are all that remains to commemorate it. Astrology is believed in, and some of its votaries are spoken of as Trikalagnas, or those who know the past, present, and future. It is due to a curse of Siva on the science of his son, who made bold by its means to predict even the future of his father, that occasional mistakes are said to occur in astrological calculations. Sorcery and witchcraft are believed to be potent powers for evil. To make a person imbecile, to paralyse his limbs, to cause him to lavish all his wealth upon another, to make him deaf and dumb, and, if need be, even to make an end of him, are not supposed to be beyond the powers of the ordinary wizard. Next to wizardry and astrology, palmistry, omens, and the lizard science are generally believed in. In the category of good omens are placed the elephant, a pot full of water, sweetmeats, fruit, fish and flesh, images of gods, kings, a cow with its calf, married women, tied bullocks, gold lamps, ghee, milk, and so on. Under the head of bad omens come the donkey, a broom, buffalo, untied bullock, barber, widow, patient, cat, washerman, etc. The worst of all omens is beyond question to allow a cat to cross one's path. An odd number of Nāyars, and an even number of Brāhmans, are good omens, the reverse being particularly bad. On the Vinayaka-chaturthi day in the month of Avani, no man is permitted to look at the rising moon under penalty of incurring unmerited obloquy.

"The chief religious festival of the Nāyars is Ōnam, which takes place in the last week of August, or first week of September. It is a time of rejoicing and merriment. Father Paulinus, writing in the latter half of the

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796 eighteenth century, observes that about the tenth of September the rain ceases in Malabar. All nature seems then as if renovated; the flowers again shoot up, and the trees bloom. In a word, this season is the same as that which Europeans call spring. The Ōnam festival is said, therefore, to have been instituted for the purpose of soliciting from the gods a happy and fruitful year. It continues for eight days, and during that time the Indians are accustomed to adorn their houses with flowers, and to daub them over with cow-dung, because the cow is a sacred animal, dedicated to the Goddess Lakshmi, the Ceres of India. On this occasion they also put on new clothes, throw away all their old earthenware, and replace it by new. Ōnam is, according to some, the annual celebration of the Malabar new year, which first began with Cheraman Perumal's departure for Mecca. But, with the majority of orthodox Hindus, it is the day of the annual visit of Mahabali to his country, which he used to govern so wisely and well before his overthrow. There is also a belief that it is Maha-Vishnu who, on Ōnam day, pays a visit to this mundane universe, for the just and proper maintenance of which he is specially responsible. In some North Malabar title-deeds and horoscopes, Mr. Logan says, the year is taken as ending with the day previous to Ōnam. This fact, he notes, is quite reconcileable with the other explanation, which alleges that the commencement of the era coincides with Perumal's departure for Arabia, if it is assumed, as is not improbable, that the day on which he sailed was Thiruvōnam day, on which acknowledgment of fealty should have been made. Ōnam, it may be observed, is a contraction of Thiruvōnam which is the asterism of the second day of the festival. Throughout the festival, boys from five to fifteen years of age go out